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The Essential Handbook

EDITED BY
PHILLIP VAN NIEKERK
AND BARBARA LUDMAN

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Foreword

The four years that have elapsed since the last edition of the *Mail & Guardian*'s *A-Z of South African Politics* have been momentous years. The African National Congress, then still shaking off its identity as a liberation movement, has become the firm party of government. Its leaders have made a remarkable transformation from activists to technocrats. This makeover is perhaps best exemplified by Trevor Manuel, the one-time long-haired radical organising rent boycotts on the Cape Flats, now a balding and suave Minister of Finance with an Oxford accent.

The focus of government is no longer the maintenance of the apartheid state, but transformation, growth and development. Success is no longer measured by the weakness of an undemocratic state but by the ability of a democratic one to deliver to the people. Police action is no longer something to be opposed but, in the face of a rising and uncontrollable crime rate, something to be wished for. We no longer want activists out of jail; we want criminals inside it.

The economic debate is no longer an abstract clash between two irreconcilable ideologies — even the communists have bought into some version of the free market — but a far more mundane, nit-picking discussion over what, if any, measures can stem the tidal wave of globalisation.

This latest edition of the *A-Z of South African Politics* provides a greater focus on government, reflecting the fact that South Africa is settling in for the probability of African National Congress rule well into the next century. This means a period of greater stability, but also one which throws up its own challenges. Where the Mandela era was one of transition, the

Mbeki government will be the first where the rulers have both feet firmly in the post-apartheid era.

Yet our society remains in flux, not only because of rapid transformation but because of the world, the continent and the time we live in. If there is one thing that is still needed it is a good road map — one that notes the changes while pointing out what they have been built on, where they have evolved from and where the road might lead.

This book is not just about the personalities but also the issues that underpin and shape our public life. In that sense it is the most substantive of the volumes of the *A-Z of South African Politics* we have published to date.

The book is supposed to be a quick reference guide but, in the tradition of its predecessors, it is not just a bland recitation of the birthdates, education and other vital statistics of South African politicians. The best reference books are those one can enjoy as a good read and then return to when detailed information is required.

Once again, this book is a collective effort, compiled from the wisdom and knowledge of journalists in the *Mail & Guardian* newsroom and good friends of the paper — some of the leading specialist journalists and academics in their fields.

The stunning new cover and page design reflect the aesthetic sensibilities of *Mail & Guardian* literary editor Shaun de Waal.

Mail & Guardian associate editor Barbara Ludman, co-editor of three editions to date, brings a wordsmith's mind to the dissemination of knowledge. Without her hounding of journalists who, despite the dictates of their profession, remain unmindful of deadlines and the rules of grammar, and her almost neurotic updating of the entries until the very last minute, this book would not be as comprehensive and readable as it is.

Phillip van Niekerk
January 1999

African Christian Democratic Party. The ACDP was formed at the end of 1993 to bring a biblical perspective to the Constitution-making process, and to offer Christians and "those who believe in family values" a viable alternative to liberal politics. The Reverend Kenneth Meshoe was elected president.

The party stands for (conservative) Christian principles, freedom of religion, and family values; an open market economy; community empowerment and human rights in a federal system; and self-governance with maximum constitutional powers at the lowest possible level. The party has called for a tax on financial transactions to replace individual and corporate taxes.

The ACDP contested the 1994 election on both national and provincial levels. Its 88 000 votes at national level guaranteed it two seats in the National Assembly. But attempting to play an effective opposition role in more than 26 parliamentary committees, the parliamentary plenary and commissions is a tall order for the party's two representatives, Meshoe and deputy leader Louis Green.

The party — like the rest of the parliamentary opposition — has failed to develop policies meaningfully distinct from those of the ANC. Its insistence on a narrow political agenda (anti-abortion and the reintroduction of the death penalty, among others) places limits on its ability to expand its support base beyond a few thousand hard-line supporters. Its parliamentary performances — except for occasional speeches by Meshoe and Green, invoking Christianity — have been dismal, and polls at the end of 1998 gave it the support of less than 1% of prospective voters.

Meshoe, born in Pretoria, studied teaching at the University of the North (Turfloop) and at a Bible college in Tennessee in the United States, and was an evangelist in German Reinhard Bonnke's Pentecostal movement in Southern Africa.

Green, born in District Six, studied at the Universities of Cape